

“DAYTOY ITI KAYA’T ITI, APUKUK”: REFUSING “SAYANG” IN *MY GRANDMOTHER AND I*

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Abstract. This article explores the tensions and possibilities of kinship between a queer grandchild and his Filipinx grandmother during the AIDS epidemic in Lani Montreal’s play, *My Grandmother and I*. While the AIDS crisis is often articulated as a collective moment of loss and mourning in Canada, this article argues that Dino and Lola refuse the logics of empire that deem his death as “sayang” and instead, open space for transnational Indigenous solidarity, humor, and care. However, this article notes that these queer possibilities and futurities are conditioned by the gendered dimensions of care work in the nuclear family.

“We’re losing him...”

The first three words that begin Lani Montreal’s play, *My Grandmother and I*, mark an ending.¹ The production opens with beeping monitors, activated defibrillators, and yelling medical personnel, flittering sonics which suggest that the opening scene is set in a hospital. As the cacophony of “clinical sounds” engulf the start of the play, three figures—Nanay [Mother], Tatay [Father], and Marissa—wait anxiously centre stage. While Nanay sits on a sofa and Tatay paces across the stage, Marissa holds the hands of another solemn figure: Lola, whose head stays bowed. Lola remains in the same position as the hospital’s sonics meld into one haunting and enduring note, which ends only as a doctor enters the stage to say, “I’m sorry. We tried everything we could to save him.” After seeking solace from her husband, Nanay slowly moves towards her mother to notify her of the death of Lola’s grandson and Nanay’s oldest child, Dino. “Ma,” she laments, “they said they tried everything to save him.” Eyebrows furrowed with soft concern, Lola tenderly replies, “But he didn’t want to be saved, Josie.” After Nanay fusses about Lola’s superstitions and urges the family to return home to begin planning for the funeral, Lola turns toward Dino’s cubicle. As the lights slowly dim into darkness, she repeats, “He didn’t want to be saved.” Continuing in Ilocano, she pleads, “Daytoy iti kaya’t iti, Apukuk [This is what my grandson would have wanted].”²

The play, *My Grandmother and I*, was written by Filipina educator,

1. Lani Montreal, “My Grandmother and I: A Play by Lani Montreal” in *Diasporic Intimacies: Queer Filipinos and Canadian Imaginaries*, edited by Robert Diaz, Marissa Largo, and Fritz Pino (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2018), 267–306.

2. Montreal, “My Grandmother and I,” 269. The final portion of this phrase is spoken in Ilocano. I want to extend my deepest thanks to my mother who assisted with the translation.

performer, activist, and writer, Lani Montreal, in the early 1990s.³ Prior to touring in Montreal and Vancouver, the play was originally performed at the St. Michael's College Theatre at the University of Toronto on December 16, 1994. Montreal's decision to produce a play, in conversation with Carmencita "Ging" Hernandez, as opposed to other modalities of outreach and education, was Montreal's attempt to raise awareness within the Filipinx Canadian community about the HIV/AIDS epidemic, particularly because "Filipino-Canadians were among the hardest hit among Asian communities."⁴ The play, as a form of performance and as a site and act of knowledge transfer, effectively entranced audiences with its familiar depictions of longing, kinship, rejection, queer loss, and hope in and through the afterlife. Through its depiction of family and loss, the play also functioned as an affective and collectivizing force, galvanizing the spectatorship of LGBTQ+ Filipinx Canadians as well as other queer, racialized, and immigrant communities, many of whom sought to create a similar cultural production to begin conversations about HIV/AIDS within their own diasporic enclaves and communities.

As a Filipinx Canadian cultural production of the 1990s, *My Grandmother and I* highlighted the exigencies and dreams of queer Filipinx Canadians among other minoritarian subjects. Between 1987 and 1992, over 5,546 AIDS-related deaths were recorded from across Canada.⁵ These deaths galvanized the emergence of organizations such as the AIDS Committee of Toronto, resources like *The Body Politic*, and memorials such as the AIDS Memorial located in Barbara Hall Park, all of which orbit the location of the play's opening stage. While the cultural production of the play highlights the necessary urgency for community care and creativity in Filipinx Canadian activism during the HIV/AIDS epidemic, I turn closely towards the story that unfolds within the production as a way to think through the politics that were performed, negotiated, and imagined during the early- to mid-1990s. While much of the scholarship focusing on the HIV/AIDS epidemic turns towards street protests and public activism as a primary site and archive of queer politics in the 1980s and 1990s, works like that of Stephen Vider turn towards the home, the domestic, and the family as another necessary site of grounding queer politics during the height of the HIV/AIDS epidemic.⁶ Alongside the politics performed within the public space, these "largely overlooked [sites of] everyday private life" attune us to "the practices, relationships, and affects—the ephemeral and embodied as well as the material" that make the home and family a necessary site and "locus of healthcare activism."⁷

My Grandmother and I begins with the death of Dino Ramirez, a queer

3. I use the term Filipina here specifically to reflect the writer's own use of the term as a self-descriptor.

4. Instead of using Filipino, I employ the term Filipinx in this article to encompass subjects across the Filipinx diaspora that do not fit within binary categories of gender. While the term Filipinx encompasses some subjects in the Philippines who may not identify with the binary language of Filipino/a, I do not seek to erase subjects who find capaciousness and kinship with the terms Filipino/Filipina in the archipelago and across diaspora. Instead, I utilize Filipinx to attend to and contend with the ways in which care labour is gendered and to open space for queer and trans subjects who are often relegated to the peripheries of these narratives, if mentioned at all. Lani Montreal, interview by Robert Diaz, "Transgressing Borders, Generations, and Taboos: Lani Montreal Reflects on *My Grandmother and I*," in *Diasporic Intimacies*, 307-310.

5. Steffanie A. Strathdee, S. G. Julio, Michael V. O'Shaughnessy, and Martin T. Schechter, "HIV/AIDS Mortality in Canada: Evidence of Gender, Regional and Local Area Differentials," *AIDS* 10, no. 8 (1996): 889-894.

6. Stephen Vider, "Public Disclosures of Private Realities: HIV/AIDS and the Domestic Archive," *The Public Historian* 41, no. 2 (2019): 163-189.

7. *Ibid.*, 165.

Filipinx Canadian man who dies as a result of AIDS-related complications. When Dino enters the spirit realm, he is told that he is unable to pass through peacefully until he unpacks his emotional baggage. To do so, he must reveal himself to one person on earth who can guide him on his spiritual mission. When presented with this daunting task, Dino immediately selects his Lola to guide him through this journey. Together, Lola and Dino navigate the tensions of complex grief, homophobia and denial, anti-Indigenous racism within the settler-colonial nation-state of so-called Canada, and cisheteropatriarchal and imperial violence. Alongside and despite this, the spectral-living pair excavate moments of joy, care, promise, collectivity, refusal, and hope within and through the loss of Dino's life. In this way, *My Grandmother and I* asks what it means to "lose" a life and "lose" your kin. The play reimagines this moment of catastrophe as a site of queer potentiality. Though the AIDS epidemic of the 1980s and 1990s often frames these deaths through motifs of loss, melancholia, grief, and moralism, Dino's spectral intimacy with his Lola offers a new kind of relationship to death that veers away from these negative affects that subsume queer life within the necropolitical. While Dino's body is already read as a corpse of masculinity during his openly queer life, he and his Lola rupture normative understandings of queer death through their reframing, reimagining, and reorienting of the term "sayang." These nonnormative intimacies in response to the HIV/AIDS crisis produce a new kind of kinship between this intergenerational pair that works towards a new politics and ethics of care; it also offers insights into the possibilities of queer intergenerational relationalities as Filipinx in Canada.

This article is organized into four parts. The first section situates the play within the historical and political conditions of the early 1990s, a moment marked by three triangulating forces: the increase in discourses of multiculturalism within Canada, the height of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, and the transition in domestic migrant labour pathways in Canada from the nurse migration to the Live-In Caregiver Program. I use this triangulation to position affective labour and care work between queer Filipinx Canadian subjects during this time. The subsequent two sections examine the key concept that undergirds my textual analysis: the use of the Tagalog and Ilocano term "sayang" within the play, followed by close readings of refusals of sayang between Dino and Lola within the play. I read these refusals as possibilities for transnational Indigenous solidarities, sites of knowledge transfer and humour, and a reimagination of care work modes of care work that operate outside of normative conceptualizations of Filipinx affective migrant labour and allow for the persistence of queer Filipinx life beyond death. In the final section, I explore the limits that condition these intergenerational relational possibilities. While literature and media surrounding the AIDS epidemic centres on the statistical accumulation of death at the hands of state-sanctioned negligence and violence, the play aims to explore the complexity of these queer and racialized lives and their relationships before, through, and after death.

In such a way, *My Grandmother and I*'s ethical position works to engage in what Eve Tuck calls "suspending damage," a way of speaking about and working with communities that refuses to locate them as damaged or broken victims of these violent histories and, instead, narrates stories of desire, hope,

and playfulness as modes of survival through these histories.⁸ Montreal's play reminds us of the ways in which queer Filipinx intimacy and care endure, even beyond death. Moreover, the play turns acutely to a significant kinship unit for diasporic families, though it is often conceptualized as the supposed periphery of the family unit, to understand the ways in which queer Filipinx life is cared for. The play demonstrates how these intergenerational relationships between Lola and apo [grandchild] open space for life, beauty, and care within, alongside, and despite historical moments in which the nation-state fails to care for its citizens, accruing an almost arithmetic accumulation of disregarded and invisibilized lives. Ultimately, I argue that Dino and Lola's *ingatan* not only reveal the complex ways in which queer racialized life is erased by the nation-state but signify the fugitive modes through which these lives are tended to and valued in the everyday.

Moreover, this article aims to engage in a critique of the gendered dimensions of affective labour and the ongoing projects of settler colonialism that structure Dino's death and his family's collective grieving. While Dino and his Lola forage new possibilities of intimacy through their kinship, I argue that these possibilities are constitutively restrained within and conditioned by the formation of the nuclear family and the political capacities of care work within the Filipinx home. Bringing together the scholarship on care work that is being done within both transnational migrant labour studies and disability studies, I analyze how the work of tending to both the living and the dead is enforced upon the women and femme Filipinx characters of the play, in ways reifying the gendered expectations of affective labour. In doing so, I note how the intersection of transnational migrations, and the beginnings of multiculturalism and HIV/AIDS in the early 1990s, condition how this piece can be read. In particular, this moment outlines how Dino and Lola's intimacy gestures beyond melancholia as it relates to their queer diasporic experience at the same time that it poses the limits of their work. What do Dino and his Lola reveal to us about what it means to be Filipinx in Canada? Queer in Canada? What are the conditions of these intimate possibilities? Although Dino and Lola's relationship obfuscates the suturing of loss to the queer Filipinx body, their kinship also works within a limited capacity as it centres care work within the settler-colonial nuclear family unit.

Collectively, this article aims to chart a different story of queer Filipinx life in the early 1990s, one that does not relegate whole personhood into the realm of the footnote or collate it into a statistic. Across the afterlives of imperialism and settler colonialism, this article indexes the ways in which queer Filipinx subjects have always attempted and continue to make unlivable worlds more liveable. However, it also reckons with the ethical negotiations and challenges that these longer histories continue to engender, maintain, police, and surveil. By reframing these diasporic intimacies through the reparative while grappling with its stakes, I hope to articulate the ways in which queer Filipinx life demands a creative mode of care and kinship that maps different genealogies of intimacy, possibility, and worlding through violent presents.

8. Eve Tuck, "Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities." *Harvard Educational Review* 79, no. 3 (2009): 409-428.

Canada in the Early 1990s: Situating My Grandmother and I

To engage with the queer potentiality of Dino and Lola's intimacy, we must first contextualize the play and the Ramirez family within the sociopolitical and geographic climate of Toronto in the early 1990s. *Diasporic Intimacies: Queer Filipinos and Canadian Imaginaries*, the queer Filipinx Canadian anthology which houses the script to *My Grandmother and I*, includes the play's program which provides brief details about each character. Dino and Marissa, the Ramirez children, were both born and raised in Canada and Mr. Ramirez, or Tatay, who "met Mrs. Ramirez in the hospital...was sponsored by his family to come to Canada in the 1970s.⁹ He is a low-land Filipino with traditional patriarchal values about family."¹⁰ While these brief descriptions do allow us to place Dino, Marissa, and Tatay in a particular fashion, I turn to Nanay's description as it provides a critical port of entry into our understanding of the Ramirez family. Her description reads, "Nurse. Mrs. Ramirez came to Canada in the 1970s. She studied in Manila and herself experienced discrimination for being a minority. She turned away from her culture because of the pain of discrimination only to discover that it exists everywhere."¹¹ While Tatay's employment remains uncertain, Nanay's employment as a healthcare professional who migrated to Canada in the 1970s gestures towards the care labour migration that marks the Filipinx-Canadian diaspora. As such, it is impossible to imagine the Ramirez family's presence in Canada, and more broadly, Filipinx presence in Canada, without routing these diasporic subjects around and through Canada's longer history of gendered care work and its promise of multiculturalism.

Prior to engaging with 1990s Canada, I turn to the 1970s to attend to the ways in which labour, migration, and gender shaped Filipinx presence in Canada, particularly as it relates to Nanay's location within the Canadian landscape. In "The Recruitment of Filipino Healthcare Professionals to Canada in the 1960s," Valerie G. Damasco notes that Ontario hospitals, such as Riverdale Hospital, sought to relieve labour shortages by sending letters of employment to nurses in the Philippines during the mid-1960s, many of whom were trained in American nurse training schools that were set up in the Philippines after 1898 as part of the U.S. colonial and imperial project.¹² Overall, Damasco highlights that "the migration of Filipino healthcare professionals to Ontario during the late 1960s was instituted simultaneously by Canadian and Philippine governmental, healthcare, and educational institutions, Canadian nursing regulatory bodies, and Canadian travel agencies through a recruitment scheme."¹³ Because of these gendered migratory forces, Nanay's, and by extension the Ramirez family's, presence in Canada is inextricable from her inclusion as part of this wave of migrant labour. While it is unclear within the play if Nanay was contacted by a hospital such as Riverside, much like other Filipinx nurses at this time, her transnational mobilities and migration during

9. Diaz, Largo, and Pino, *Diasporic Intimacies*.

10. Montreal, "My Grandmother and I," 267.

11. *Ibid.*

12. Valerie G. Damasco, "The Recruitment of Filipino Healthcare Professionals to Canada in the 1960s," in *Filipinos in Canada: Disturbing Invisibility*, edited by Roland Sintos Coloma et al. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 97-122; Catherine Ceniza Choy, *Empire of Care: Nursing and Migration in Filipino American History* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

13. Damasco, "The Recruitment of Filipino Healthcare Professionals," 104-105.

this period remain part of a larger structure of Canada's institutionalization of care work which brought Filipinx nurses to perform their labours in Canada.

In addition to the migration of nurses into Canada from the 1970s onwards, the institutionalization of care also brought forth the implementation of domestic care work schemes, programs that mobilized the mass migration of many Filipinx nurses, nurse aides, and other care workers to the Global North. These healthcare professionals from the Philippines were often de-professionalized upon their arrival to Canada, so many American-trained Filipinx nurses inevitably were made to work as domestic helpers and care workers in Canadian families' homes. These migrations shifted the social and political underpinnings of the nuclear family on numerous levels. Dierdre McKay describes the transnational shift of networks of care, or the Care Chain,¹⁴ as "the globalization of labour markets...drawing Third World women to the developed North" to maintain the white nuclear family through modes of emotional and physical care in the home.¹⁵ Irish and Anglophone British women were originally relied upon to "care for" and "care about" their employers in Canada, however these bodies were replaced by women of colour after the mobilization of white women into the workforce.¹⁶ This socioeconomic moment propelled the production of the Caribbean Domestic Scheme (CDS) in the 1950s, followed by the Foreign Domestic Movement (FDM) in 1981, which was then replaced by the Live-In Caregiver Program (LCP) in 1992.¹⁷ The FDM and its successor galvanized the migration and responsibility of Caribbean and Filipina women, respectively, to perform this domestic labour. As such, these Filipinx bodies, along with the other racialized bodies within the Care Chain, were figured as devalued labour, commodities that provide high-quality physical and affective services for a low price. Filipinx migrants in Canada continue to be "resold as commodities" through online advertisements and sponsorship information sites.¹⁸ The systemic deprofessionalization and discursive representation of migrant caregivers not only render racialized services as commodities, but the very bodies themselves as products of racial and social capital.

The institutionalization and industrialization of both domestic care and healthcare work in Canada by way of U.S. empire promulgated the desire for, and maintenance of, a particular Filipinx migrant subject. The commodification of the Filipinx caregiver and the naturalization of care as both characteristic of Filipinx womanhood and femininity worked to reify what Martin Manalansan terms "the seemingly logical arrangement and natural symmetry of this rather static formula that reads as follows: domestic = family = heterosexual woman = care and love."¹⁹ As a legacy and technology of U.S. empire, these

14. Dierdre McKay, "'Sending Dollars Shows Feeling' - Emotions and Economies in Filipino Migration," *Mobilities* 2, no. 2 (2007): 175-194.

15. *Ibid.*, 176.

16. Dionisio Nyaga and Rose Ann Torres, "Gendered Citizenship: A Case Study of Paid Filipino Male Live-In Caregivers in Toronto," *International Journal of Asia-Pacific Studies* 13, no. 1 (2017).

17. Ethel Tungohan, "Reconceptualizing Motherhood, Reconceptualizing Resistance: Migrant Domestic Workers, Transnational Hyper-Maternalism and Activism," *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 15, no. 1 (2013): 39-57.

18. Janis Letchumanan, "Filipino Nannies: The Cost of Caring," *Pacific Rim Magazine* (2013).

<http://langaraprm.com/2013/community/filipino-nannies-the-cost-of-caring-like-many-fo-reign-nannies-marylou-tuzon-looks-after-other-families-in-order-to-take-care-of-her-own/>.

19. Martin F. Manalansan IV, "Queering the chain of care paradigm." *Scholar & Feminist Online* 6.3 (2008): 2, https://sfonline.barnard.edu/immigration/manalansan_01.htm.

labour migrations worked to configure the proper Filipinx migrant subject as heterosexual, assumingly cisgender, and one that works to consistently uphold the ideals of the white nuclear family unit. Not only did these prescribe ideals of care and nurturing onto women and other feminized Filipinx subjects but include “an absolute disinvestment of Third World men from care work.”²⁰ Thus, alongside the racialization and gendering of Filipinx womanhood, U.S. empire utilized global care work as a mode through which to ascribe ideals of masculinity onto Filipinx subjects. So, considering the work of feminization of care labour is significant because it allows us to understand other forms of Filipinx subjectivity in the Global North, which, as Josen Diaz notes, requires attending to the ways in which “masculinized conceptualizations of the nation as well as the gendered labour of ‘women’s work’ undergird every invocation of Filipino identity.”²¹ As Kale Fajardo’s work on Filipinx masculinities and seafaring makes clear, the feminization of Filipinx labour also affects Filipinx migrant men who were either deemed “hypermasculine or threatening, especially to white labour, white men, and/or white women” while “other Filipino men were constructed as ‘feminine’” and employed in other kinds of domestic labour.²² Thus, the production of the proper migrant Filipinx subject always operates in relation to imperial regimes and “orientalist logics” which sought to create a particular gendered and racialized subject of empire.

Not only did U.S. empire seek to create a particular mode of acceptable Filipinx subjectivity through the institution of global care work, but accomplished this through its invocation of discourses of Canadian multiculturalism alongside these global care labour programs during the early 1990s. Along with the creation of the Foreign Domestic Movement (FDM), the mid-1980s also marked the beginning of the use of multiculturalism as a language by which subjects would assert their own belonging and recognition as Canadians within the diasporic context.²³ Following a shift in consciousness of racial divides and fragmentations as a result of the radical cultural impact of the 1960s, the postmodern design of Canadian identity began to materialize through state policy in 1971.²⁴ Not only did this mobilization preface the construction of a shared Canadian identity but it also functioned as a persistent myth-making tool that posited Canada as an exceptional power that “affords its national subjects an intimate and innocent sense of self, history, and place.”²⁵ During this time, structural adjustment policies (SAPs) were also set in place to pay off the international debt of the Global South to the Global North through the CDS and FDM. Transnational migrant labour and multiculturalism were tied together through the use of SAPs, which used the promise of multiculturalism, the facade of Canadian benevolence, the potentiality of Canadian residence and citizenship, and the “uniqueness” of its diasporic enclaves in order to

20. Ibid., 2.

21. Ibid.

22. Kale Bantigue Fajardo, *Filipino Crosscurrents: Oceanographies of Seafaring, Masculinities, and Globalization* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

23. Ibid.

24. Richard J. F. Day, *Multiculturalism and the History of Canadian Diversity* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2000); OmiSoore H. Dryden and Suzanne Lenon, “Introduction: Interventions, Iterations, and Interrogations that Disturb the (Homo) nation,” in *Disrupting Queer Inclusion: Canadian Homonationalisms and the Politics of Belonging*, edited by OmiSoore H. Dryden and Suzanne Lenon (Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia Press, 2015), 3-18.

25. Dryden and Lenon, “Introduction,” 9-10.

foster these global migrations. By advertising a sense of belonging and cultural recognition through multiculturalism, migrants were able to, and still do, take on a national identity and call Canada “home.”

Alongside these subject-making processes in the early 1990s was the peak of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the Global North. Here, it is crucial to ask: what did the HIV/AIDS crisis mean in Canada in the early 1990s? Epidemiological evidence regarding the epidemic centred mainly on the illnesses and deaths of white queer bodies during the peak of the epidemic. As aforementioned, racialized queer bodies were excluded into the realm of the footnote within social and political discourse or were used as specimens for epidemiological research without the intentions of developing a cure. It was only in the late 1980s and early 1990s that racialized communities were beginning to be considered as vulnerable queer subjects worthy of epidemiological research and medical service. On an institutional and systemic level, however, much like the language of multiculturalism, we also begin to see a shift into rights-based discourse. In *Queer Returns*, Walcott states,

Stonewall was a queer sexual liberation, alongside heterosexual liberation, but HIV/AIDS was citizen-making; the distinction is important. HIV/AIDS worked to produce a very particular and specific queer subjecthood. It was a subject who was sick and diseased in a fashion different from how homosexuality as illness had been previously conceived (even though in some people’s view one illness led to the other) in the ‘eventful moment’ of AIDS. Thus, it is in the realm of sickness and death that a very specific queer subjecthood comes into being.²⁶

Here, Walcott outlines an important shift during the mid-1980s. The movement from queer liberation to a rights-based discourse produced a new form of recognition of the queer subject by the state. Queer rights advocacy not only regulated and maintained the upward mobilization of white, upper-class queer subjects, but also epitomized state recognition and assimilation as measurements of progress and success.

Because the production of the proper Filipinx citizen-subject within Canada is undergirded by the logics of empire and capital tied to the heteronormative nuclear family formation, the queer subject, which now operated in the “realm of sickness and death,” was jettisoned out of the appropriate citizenship. Despite the vilification of queer subjects during the AIDS epidemic, power inequities and possibilities for queer kinship were not distributed equally. As a result of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, Douglas Crimp recognizes an upward mobility of white heteronormative queer subjects by the state as a result of their “maturity” into normative models of family, respectability, and responsibility. Though these upward mobilities allowed for the recognition of white homonormative queer subjects, “racialized queer citizen-subjects” remained on the outskirts of proper citizen-making.²⁷ As

26. Rinaldo Walcott, *Queer Returns: Essays on Multiculturalism, Diaspora, and Black Studies* (Toronto, ON: Insomniac Press, 2016).

27. Julian Awwad, “Queer Regulation and the Homonational Rhetoric of Canadian Exceptionalism,” in *Disrupting Queer Inclusion*.

such, the uptake of multiculturalism as a language for recognition, the increase of transnational migrant labour, and HIV/AIDS as constitutive of queer Filipinx subjecthood must all be read as an assemblage in order to understand the exact processes of citizen-making that locate the Ramirez family in Canada and encumber the possibilities of their kinship. This formulaic approach to this particular moment does not suggest any kind of singularity of a queer diasporic Filipinx experience, nor do I mean to condense the nuances of queer diasporic life into such a monolith. Instead, through a textual analysis of *My Grandmother and I*, I seek to understand how these three forces come together, what work they are able to do, as well as what they hinder and are unable to achieve.

In what follows, I close read several moments within the following scenes of the play, in which the Ramirez family navigates tensions concerning Dino's death at his funeral. If the forces of multiculturalism, global care work, and the HIV/AIDS epidemic sought to produce the proper Filipinx citizen-subject in Canada, Dino's subjectivity as a queer Filipinx man who dies due to AIDS-related complications jettisons him out of the realm of respectable Filipinx citizenship. As such, *My Grandmother and I* illuminates the ways that these heteronormative ideals and logics of empire are reified within the nuclear family. However, queer kinships that emerge between Dino, particularly with other women and feminized friends and family, demonstrate other conditions of possibility forged through this ostensible moment of loss.

Sayang!!

Shortly after the play's mournful opening in "Scene 2: The Encounter," Dino has a conversation with Apo Kalaingan, the spiritual entity who discloses the necessity for Dino to continue his spectral journey on earth, and then he ironically reveals himself to his Lola by jumping out of her closet. After grappling with the shock of seeing Dino's spectral form, Lola learns of his mission and asks, "But Dino, what is this burden you speak of? How can I help you?" After he tells her to rest and assures her they will speak again, she inquires, "Will I see you again? What did you want me to wear at your funeral?" To this Dino replies, "Your traditional dress. The one you wear at the caravan. I love the colours," before disappearing back into the closet. Taking Dino's request seriously, Lola stands out as the only person dressed colourfully within a sea of black outfits in the following scene entitled, "The Wake." The scene begins with Nanay berating both Lola and Marissa for, respectively, dressing colourfully at a funeral and for bringing her Indigenous boyfriend whom Tatay disapproves of. Immediately afterwards, she commands, "Both of you (Marissa and Lola)—If anybody asks any questions, Dino died of pneumonia, okay?"²⁸

As *My Grandmother and I* moves beyond the moment of Dino's death, the subsequent two scenes, "The Encounter" and "The Wake," illuminate the emerging tensions and kinships within the Ramirez family's nuclear family unit. "The Wake," in particular, reveals the tensions with which Dino's queerness poses harm to the formation of respectable citizenship within the nuclear family structure. Nanay's plea to Marissa and Lola makes explicit the

28. Montreal, "My Grandmother and I," 274.

ways in which both Nanay and Tatay refuse to attribute Dino's death to AIDS-related illnesses out of fear that it would expose the queer identity of their child. These desires to veil Dino's queerness emerge again when shortly after, Ken, Dino's partner, enters the funeral parlor and openly weeps in front of his casket. In a panicked response, Nanay and Tatay relieve the extended family's suspicion through fabrications, clarifying that "they were so close," going so far as to say that "they were like brothers."²⁹ However, as Nanay and Tatay continue to conceal the cause of Dino's death, Marissa rejects her mother's wishes. The act inevitably concludes with Marissa revealing Dino's sexuality to her resistant cousin, Tina. In response to Marissa's disclosure, Tina woefully admits, "I guess that was what he was always trying to tell us when he said he was different. Sayang (sobs more)," revealing shortly after that she has a crush on Ken.³⁰

Tina's use of the word "sayang" reveals to the presumably Tagalog- and Ilocano-comprehensive audience precisely how queerness functions within this Filipinx family.³¹ In the contemporary Filipinx diaspora, the term is often used within colloquial conversations and can be translated into various phrases depending on the context from which the word arises; however, it is most frequently utilized as an exclamative phrase meaning, "What a waste!" or "What a pity!" Tina's apprehension to imagine or reframe Dino as a queer subject may stem from her internalized conceptions of what queerness is and does. I tread lightly here, as I do not mean to frame the Filipinx-Canadian diasporic community as another "supposedly homo- and queer-phobic [community] of colour [that represents] a vile 'culturalized' intolerance of queerness through the rigid demands of their culture for heteronormativity, domesticity, and kinship—what Puar refers to as 'multicultural heteronormativity.'"³² Instead, I illuminate these refusals of Dino's queerness as part of the political project of heteronormativity which, again, continues to be upheld and maintained through the industrialization of global care work and the citizen-making productions of Canadian multiculturalism. Despite the Philippines' rich history of queerness from the precolonial folklore of babaylan to the contemporary bakla, homophobia within the Ramirez family functions to uphold the tenets of respectable citizenship that undergird Filipinx diasporic care work and the discourses of HIV/AIDS and Canadian multiculturalism.³³ Within "The Wake," it is clear that transnational Filipinx labour migrations, the use of Canadian multiculturalism, and the HIV/AIDS epidemic are the mechanisms through which homophobia emerges within this heteronormative Filipinx Canadian nuclear family.

In *My Grandmother and I*, "sayang" exists not merely as an erasure or universal vilification of queer lives or queerness by Filipinx cultures; it is an expression that embodies a particular kind of queer loss. To be sayang,

29. *Ibid.*, 275.

30. *Ibid.*, 279.

31. "Sayang" is both a Tagalog and Ilocano term that is used to express the same affective themes of disappointment, lost opportunities, waste, and pity.

32. Amar Wahab, "Unveiling Fetishnationalism: Bidding for Citizenship in Queer Times," in *Disrupting Queer Inclusion*, 35-48.

33. Paulina Abustan, "Recovering and Reclaiming Queer and Trans Indigenous and Mestiza Pilipinx Identities," *Journal of Mestizo and Indigenous Voices* 1, no. 1 (2015): 1-10; Robert Diaz, "The Limits of Bakla and Gay: Feminist Readings of My Husband's Lover, Vice Ganda, and Charice Pempengco," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 40, no. 3 (2015): 721-745.

something must first present itself as valuable or pragmatic and it is through its very loss that the goal, object, or subject loses its value. In other words, queer loss is what allows a subject to become *sayang*. In the play, Tina's exasperated reaction to Dino's queerness arises as a result of an anticipatory loss of personal and cultural value. In one sense, *sayang* marks for Tina the loss of her own romantic and sexual desires for a potential relationship with Ken, a man who inevitably turned out to be Dino's partner. However, Tina's response also indicates another loss. When Marissa tells her that Dino was gay, she states, "Dino would never do that. He always knew how to make us girls feel better."³⁴ While Tina cries out "*sayang*" in immediate response to her crush for Ken, I further interrogate her use of this term in relation to her conception of losing Dino, the masculine cousin she sought protection and relief from.

To his family, Dino represents a heteronormative and patriarchal masculinist ideal—a man who can take care of his family including, but not limited to, the emotional needs of Filipinas within a nuclear family framework. So, in addition to losing Dino wastefully to Ken, Tina also performs a sense of betrayal, a loss of a particular kind of politic she believed was at work between Dino and the women in his life. It is critical to consider the racial logics and histories that this particular kind of masculinity is structured through. At Dino's funeral, his queer friends, Chris and Joey, engage in a euphemistic, sexually-insinuating conversation with Dino's oblivious Uncle in the Philippine military who had travelled to the wake. When confronting the two friends about Dino's queerness, he states, "It's just that, Dino—he's a little too soft. Not like you guys. I kept telling his Dad to bring him to the Philippines so I can toughen him—make him into a real man—you know what I mean?"³⁵ Ostensibly, this scene at the funeral illustrates a humorous social encounter between two gay jocks and an unaware, nostalgic, and homophobic Philippine army veteran. However, this colloquial conversation signifies the historical and ongoing presence of imperialism within the Philippines as a result of Spanish, American, and Japanese colonial and imperial encounters.³⁶ Not only does Uncle's dialogue reflect the contemporary, postmodern moment of martial law in the Philippines, but it gestures towards the political and social legacies of these empires.³⁷ In particular, Uncle's encounter with Chris and Joey exemplifies the gendered, racial, and sexual dimensions of imperial conquest that continue to shape particular modes of surveillance, embodiment, memory, desires, and politics within the everyday.

In *My Grandmother and I*, the production of the nurturing protection desired by the women of Dino's family is co-constitutive of the production of imperial masculinities. The existence of imperialism via militarism in the Philippines reflects both the explicit dialogue of Dino's Uncle as well as the implicit ideologies that form his intentions; Tina and Uncle's conception of

34. Montreal, "My Grandmother and I," 279.

35. *Ibid.*, 277.

36. Reynaldo Clemena Iletto, "Philippine Wars and the Politics of Memory," *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 13, no. 1 (2005): 215-235.

37. Jocelyn Martin, "Martial Law as Philippine Trauma: Group Culture, the Sacred, and Impunity in Three Memoirs," *Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints* 66, no. 4 (2018): 453-480; Portia L. Reyes, "Claiming History: Memoirs of the Struggle against Ferdinand Marcos's Martial Law Regime in the Philippines," *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* 33, no. 2 (2018): 457-498.

“a real man” is the patriarchal, patriotic, masculine ideal of the state: strong, aggressive, dominant, and morally willing to serve and protect the nation and its subsequent structures, such as the nuclear family. These gendered ascriptions fit neatly within the ideals of the family that the triangulation of the 1990s hails: a racialized, cisheteronormative figure that can maintain the nuclear family unit within multicultural Canada. Their reading of Dino suggests that his masculinity does not fulfill the requirements of Filipinx manhood and respectable citizenship as determined by the imperial nation-state. In this way, this form of masculinity is extrapolated from the incessant militaristic presence in the Philippines as a result of successional imperial encounters. In addition, the masculinist protectionism that is a defining feature of the military cannot be extracted from the racial geographies and historiographies that structure it.

Ongoing colonial encounters with the Philippines and their ensuing constraining logics mold gendered expectations within the social, institutional, psychic, and political in order to further structure colonial and imperial powers under white supremacy. Dino’s queerness figures him as “not masculine enough” for manhood. Yet, Dino’s Uncle believes that the “right” masculinity can be built from the supposedly tattered and broken pieces of Dino’s prior self. Dino’s Uncle equates “toughening him,” through assumed militaristic violence or physical aggression, to turning him “into a real man.” By joining the Philippine military or, according to Tina, by taking care of the women in his family by way of masculinist protection, Dino could venture beyond the imagined ideal and possibly embody the masculinity that would label him “a real man.” In accordance with Tina’s earlier comment, Dino is sayang here as well. His effeminacy and sexuality, again, render his masculinity obsolete. His masculinity, or what could have been his masculinity, was wasted on his queerness. Dino’s queerness is seen by some of the members of his family as that which holds him back from maintaining an ideal position within the gaze of the state and within the eyes of his family. His queerness wastes what could possibly serve their nuclear family unit and their nation. This mode of queer loss constitutes Dino’s embodiment during his life as well as his death. As a living queer Filipinx subject, Dino was already a corpse—a failed project of masculine upbringing. This ascription was not coincidental but consequential of the imperial logics that not only marked Philippine–U.S. relations, but the violences of empire that undergirded transnational migrant labour into multicultural Canada.

By considering these imperial logics, what is at stake here is Dino’s ability to perform the kind of masculinity that would allow for the protection of both the nation-state and nuclear family. For members of Dino’s family, Filipinx masculinity, more specifically, masculinist protectionism, is at stake and he wastes this through his queerness. However, this conceptualization of masculinity operates in tension and conflicts with what Hoang Tan Nguyen describes as “bottomhood.”³⁸ According to Nguyen, “bottomhood” relegates Asian masculinities, particularly as they are located within the Global North,

38. Hoang Tan Nguyen, *A View From the Bottom: Asian American Masculinity and Sexual Representation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).

into the realm of the feminine. Nguyen's intervention in his seminal text articulates bottomhood "not as a fixed role, an identity, or a physical act, but as a position--sexual, social, affective, political, aesthetic" that reimagines the generative capacity of vulnerability in the representation of Asian American men, particularly as desexualized or feminine.³⁹ In this way, Dino is trapped within a double-bind of representation: on one hand, he is pushed to identify and perform a particular kind of masculinity that furthers imperialist notions of gender and militarism by the state; on the other hand, the representation of the Asian body during sex, the erotic, and the intimate will always be trapped within the supposed bounds of the feminine.⁴⁰ Through both, Dino faces the impossibility of meeting enforced ideals of masculinity. I imagine that Tina would read this, too, as *sayang*.

It is equally important that the occurrence of this term is happening at Dino's wake. In *Melancholia and Moralism*, Douglas Crimp critiques the conservative, mainstream, and rights-based movements that emerged after the AIDS activism of the 1980s and 1990s.⁴¹ Crimp writes specifically that "...mourning is the reaction not only to the death of a loved person, but also 'to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as fatherland, liberty, an ideal.'"⁴² In this way, *sayang* marks the loss of something once imagined as valuable in the context of Montreal's work. For Dino, his ability to protect and maintain the masculine ideals of the state were of value to his family. Moreover, the double-bind of representation, as a failed masculine ideal that will always be encumbered by his feminization as an Asian subject, reflects Crimp's conceptual framework of melancholia which dictates that the queer subject was never right in the first place. While he could have been made "into a real man," his erotic femininity, according to Nguyen, was inescapable. In this way, Dino's family suggests that he will always be trapped within this bind, within mourning, within death. Thus, loss, death, and mourning within the play are located within and, in some senses, function as Dino's queer subjectivity.

Refusing *Sayang*: Kinship's Otherwise Possibilities and Limits

Though much of the discourse surrounding HIV and AIDS centres around motifs of loss, commemoration, memorialization, mourning, and collective grief, I seek to find the generative capacities that accompanied and emerged from Dino's death. I turn to the work of Eric C. Wat to think through the ways in which activism on the ground by queer Asians during the HIV/AIDS epidemic provide points of entry into otherwise possibilities for this political moment. In *Love Your Asian Body*, Wat details the creative and imaginative ways by which queer Asians in Los Angeles provided community outreach, disseminated knowledge, and engaged in harm reduction during the height of the HIV/AIDS epidemic.⁴³ By turning to kinships that operate outside of

39. Nguyen, *A View from the Bottom*, 3.

40. Jennifer C. Nash, *The Black Body in Ecstasy: Reading Race, Reading Pornography* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).

41. Douglas Crimp, *Melancholia and Moralism: Essays on AIDS and Queer Politics* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002).

42. Crimp quoting Freud, 140.

43. Eric C. Wat, *Love Your Asian Body: AIDS Activism in Los Angeles* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2022).

“idioms of ancestry, descent, and family,” queer Asian activists and community members turned this political moment of invisibilization, care injustice, and state violence, into a site of emergent possibility.⁴⁴ Scholars in kinship studies such as David Eng, Tyler Bradway, and Elizabeth Freeman describe kinships as “emergent patterns of social belonging” that “organize contemporary structures of family... as well as the privatized space of the intimate in our colorblind age of global capitalism,” as well as being “a horizon of violence and possibility.”⁴⁵ By turning outside of the immediate nuclear family unit, I look to a subject on the periphery, the figure of the Lola, to see what other kinds of politics are at work in *My Grandmother and I*.

While the scene at the wake offers glimpses into the ways in which kinships can operate as sites of violence, Dino and his Lola’s relationship offers us a textual, visual, and sonic language of queer diasporic life that is rich with longing, intimacy, kinship, and possibility. While other members of Dino’s family read his queerness and resulting death as melancholic, Lola’s perspective of Dino does not lie in his masculinity, but from the value he brings to her life and their kinship. Unable to depart from the human realm into the spirit world, Dino is made to choose one person who can aid in relieving the load of emotional trauma and baggage he carries. Dino chooses his 65-year-old Lola. Contrary to the SILENCE = DEATH, ACT UP = LIVING polarizations of the AIDS crisis, Dino’s death is embodied not through his silence or invisibility, but exactly in his ability to act and be seen by his Lola as a result of his death.⁴⁶ Dino’s ability to enact a new kind of politics within his home, to his family, and through his death suggests a new response to AIDS and its impacts, much like the activist work of ACT UP during the peak of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, that emerges in matters of the diasporic home and family. It is exactly through Dino’s death that he and his Lola can begin to imagine otherwise possibilities of what their kinship entails.⁴⁷

Christina Sharpe’s ground-breaking text, *In the Wake*, offers a series of key concepts and questions that provide a foundation for understanding the politics that Dino and Lola engender.⁴⁸ With great care and thoughtfulness, Sharpe coins the term “wake work” to describe both inhabiting as well as rupturing containment within the afterlives of transatlantic slavery. Part of this project, however, is attending and tending to those deaths. Sharpe asks,

What does it mean to defend the dead? To tend to the Black dead and dying: to tend to the Black person, to Black people, always living in the push toward our death? It means work. It is work: hard emotional,

44. Tyler Bradway and Elizabeth Freeman, “Introduction: Kincoherence/ Kin-aesthetics/ Kinematics,” in *Queer Kinship: Race, Sex, Belonging, Form*, edited by Tyler Bradway and Elizabeth Freeman (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2022), 3; Akemi Nishida, *Just Care: Messy Entanglements of Disability, Dependency, and Desire* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2022).

45. Bradway and Freeman, “Introduction,” 3. David L. Eng, *The Feeling of Kinship: Queer Liberalism and the Racialization of Intimacy* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 2.

46. Charles E. Morris, “Remembering AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) 1987-2012 and Beyond, ACT UP 25: HIV/AIDS, Archival Queers, and Mnemonic World Making,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 98, no. 1 (2012): 49-53.

47. Here, I do not mean to limit the rich and diverse response to AIDS solely to ACT UP. While other Canadian organizations such as GAT, ACAS, and SAAP reflect the complexities of AIDS prevention, education, and service at the intersection of race, diaspora, and queerness, I wanted to acknowledge the significance of ACT UP as it is mentioned in “My Grandmother and I” as it, in several ways, galvanized some response in Toronto for Filipinx.

48. Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016).

physical, and intellectual work that demands vigilant attendance to the needs of the dying, to ease their way, and also to the needs of the living.⁴⁹

Here, Sharpe calls her readers to reorient their care towards those who have died, are dying from, and continue to live through the murderous wake of anti-Blackness in the United States and Canada. Moreover, Sharpe maps a constellation of wake work across the span of her lifetime, noting the work that her mother engaged in at home despite their living in an uninhabitable world. In particular, Sharpe writes, “[My mother] brought beauty into that house in every way that she could; she worked at joy, and she made livable moments, spaces, and places in the midst of all that was unlivable there... In other words, even as we experienced, recognized, and lived subjection, we did not simply or only live in subjection and as the subjected.”⁵⁰ While Sharpe’s work centres on the wake work of Black life and thought, I want to glean from her analytic a different way to think through Dino’s death as one that emerges in and through the afterlives of empire that shape his queer diasporic life. Rather than regarding Dino’s death as a loss, I want to instead turn to it as an opportunity. I want to defend it and tend to it, in the same way Lola has. Additionally, I want to think through the relationship between Lola and Dino, as grandmother and grandson, to think through what work they were engaging in with one another to live beyond imperialism and violent erasure.

The legacies of U.S. empire did not end after America entrusted its “little brown brothers” to govern themselves; they continue to shape the lives of queer subjects both in the Philippines and across its diasporas.⁵¹ In Robert Diaz’s prolific article, “Biyuti from Below,” he places the film *Die Beautiful* in conversation with the murder of Jennifer Laude, a Filipina trans woman, by a U.S. marine to think through the ways in which kabaklaan, a particular kind of performance engaged by Filipinx people of marginalized sexualities, galvanizes creative modes of solidarity alongside and despite violence.⁵² In particular, Diaz writes, “Laude’s ganda [beauty] is the queerness that militarism, violence, and death cannot erase....Laude’s biyuti matters because it is the ghostly spectre of trans* life that was once lived with hope, optimism, and playfulness, even if this life was snuffed out and violently eliminated.”⁵³ Diaz’s work, always driven by the restorative and reparative, performs a reading of Laude’s death that does not simply relegate her into a trans necropolitical and “murderous inclusion.”⁵⁴ In spite of the violences of the Visiting Forces Agreement, Diaz notes that which made her life worth living and that which endures beyond

49. *Ibid.*, 10.

50. *Ibid.*, 4.

51. Casey Mecija, “The Desert’s No Home for a Rose”: Filipinx Childhood and Music as Aesthetic Experience,” *Global Studies of Childhood* 11, no. 2 (2021): 164-178. Quoting U.S. Governor General William Taft’s famous description of Filipinos.

52. Robert Diaz, “Biyuti from Below: Contemporary Philippine Cinema and the Transing of Kabaklaan,” *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 5, no. 3 (2018): 404-424.

53. A linguistic reinterpretation of the term “beauty” embodied and utilized by those performing kabaklaan. The use of trans* here is gestures to the multiple embodiments, performances, identities, and subjectivities that capaciously emerge around yet are not always confined within the use and language of transgender or trans.

54. Diaz, “Biyuti from Below,” 419, translation mine. C. Riley Snorton and Jin Haritaworn, “Trans Necropolitics: A Transnational Reflection on Violence, Death, and the Trans of Color Afterlife,” in *The Transgender Studies Reader Remix*, edited by Susan Stryker and Dylan McCarthy Blackston (New York: Routledge, 2022), 305-316.

her death: Laude's *biyuti*.⁵⁵

These reparative ethics that both Diaz and Sharpe's work outline are what I employ in my reading of *My Grandmother and I*. As aforementioned, after hearing of Dino's death at the beginning of the play, Lola notes that Dino did not want to be saved because to do so would be to articulate Dino as a subject in need of rescue. Lola's resistance to constitute or articulate Dino as "broken" or "needing to be saved" immediately attests to her conception of Dino, his queerness, and death--which his extended family views as a result of the former--as already entirely external to mourning. Moreover, in her Ilocano closing phrase, "Daytoy iti kaya't iti, Apukuk," or "This is what my grandson would have wanted," she engages in the work that Sharpe calls us to do: that "vigilant attendance to the needs of the dying, to ease their way." Even through his death, Lola honours Dino's desires, aspirations, and wants. While the public healthcare institutions, multiculturalism, and global care work programs employ the language of care to further maintain imperial logics, Dino and Lola enact what Akemi Nishida refers to as "just care," wherein they use this same term, "care," but for other means.⁵⁶

Though Dino's queerness is deemed to be "sayang" at the wake, Lola's encounters with Dino across other moments in the play demonstrate a different interpretation of *sayang*. While *sayang* is mobilized as a mode of loss during the funeral, another way in which to read *sayang* is to feel as though one has missed an opportunity. Engaging in *sayang* from this framing opens space for sociality, kinship, possibility, relationality, and intimacy. By turning away from the construction of respectable citizenship, Dino and Lola's kinship asks: How does engaging with *sayang* differently allow for an alternative reading of Dino's queerness? What happens when we refuse *sayang*'s call? When we refuse to waste opportunities and take seriously the call to deeply and attentively engage with queer desires, what can we glean? What happens when we listen to the needs, desires, dreams, and hopes of the dead?

After his death, Dino notes that chooses his Lola because she is the "kindest, most understanding person he knows."⁵⁷ Lola's gentle wisdom and compassion are crucial factors of value for Dino, traits that he believes will allow him to pass on peacefully. Although Dino's extended family views valuable subjects as pragmatic to the state and domestic sphere, his Lola offers a new perspective of queer diasporic value that, in ways, reflects the vulnerabilities that bottomhood necessitates. Later at the funeral, Lola mirrors him during a speech, stating,

There was no one like him, my beautiful Dino. He always knew how to make me laugh. When I was sad and missed the place where I was born, Dino— he would listen to me tell all those stories about the mountains. He never tired of listening— that boy. He would always say, 'Grandma, you're the best history teacher in the world...' What can I say about

55. An agreement between the United States and the Philippines which states that if a member of the United States military commits a crime in the Philippines, all jurisdiction over the crime will be overseen and exercised solely by United States authorities. It is because of this agreement that Jennifer Laude's murder was unable to be overseen by the Philippine judicial system.

56. Nishida, *Just Care*, 7.

57. Montreal, "My Grandmother and I," 273.

Dino that you did not know about him? (People start whispering) He was the kindest, most loving person. But he also knew how to fight—like a true warrior... He is here now. His spirit is restless... Addatuy iti apukuk... We have to help him find peace... Tulungan tayo tapno agtal na isuna.⁵⁸

Their mutual regard for each other as the kindest, most loving people they know exemplifies an alternate narration of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Both Dino and Lola do not take this moment in which they can see each other to articulate loss, they refuse to lose this opportunity and instead perform their mutual longing.

Lola's speech at the funeral demonstrates three particular areas in which she reshapes narrations of loss into an attuned engagement with queer desires. First, their queer kinship centres moments of laughter, joy, pleasure, and communality alongside and despite grief and death. In an interview with the playwright, Montreal notes that she explicitly chose the figure of the Lola because "they are only there to care for [their grandchildren] and provide guidance as necessary" without other pressures to shape or mold their kin into an archetype of their imagining.⁵⁹ In "The Encounter," when Dino first appears to Lola as an apparition, Lola freely expresses her anger at him after a brief moment of shock. Immediately, she coyly pesters him about the blanket he swore to make her but can no longer get to, his promise to take her to see Jurassic Park in theatres which she now must see alone, and her inability to use her senior's pass for half-price movies without his help. Nevertheless, Lola inevitably lightens the mood and expresses gratitude that Dino could reach the spirit realm at Mount Apuyo, humorously saying, "I thought the spirits would never find their way in Toronto. They will get disoriented with the subways, cars, and the CN Tower. It happens to me all the time."⁶⁰

Lola brings up these moments not to berate Dino for abandoning her, but in search of a spectral-living connection through humour and laughter. Within a production that focuses on death, mourning, and melancholia, Lola rearticulates Dino as her amusing grandchild. This use of humour not only illustrates the importance of comedy as a coping mechanism and communicative technology for diasporic Filipinx communities but also demonstrates what qualities Lola admires in Dino in all of his complex personhood. When Dino is revealed as a ghost, she is angered not because of his death, queerness, nor his failure of masculinity, but his inability to spend time with and return what he promised her. This marks a stark contrast to the model of Filipinx masculinity that Dino's extended family embraces. Through both his perseverance as well as his kindness, Lola lauds Dino's strength outside of the reproduction of the "tough" ideologies of manhood enforced upon him. It is not despite his queerness that Dino is deemed valuable; with his Lola, his value emerges precisely because of his queerness. It is something that she is committed to tending to. When Dino instructs her not to wear black at his funeral unless

58. *Ibid.*, 297.

59. Montreal, "Transgressing Borders, Generations, and Taboos," 307.

60. Montreal, "My Grandmother and I," 272.

accessorized with chains and leather (which of course she agreed to do), instead of meeting him with equal sarcasm, she reminds him of the burden he carries, asking, “how can I help you?”⁶¹ At this moment, Lola disrupts the joke instead of delivering it. This question, posed to the anxious Dino at his own funeral, marks not only a recognition of his affect, but an acknowledgement of the contexts from which it emerges. Lola is aware of how sexuality, race, diaspora, family, sex, and sickness structure the space of the funeral home and inform the social, political, and institutional affiliations of its attendees. While his queerness was formerly considered his greatest waste, Lola considers Dino’s haunting embodiment of diasporic queerness to be the very thing she cares for.

Secondly, by taking Dino’s desires seriously, Lola and Dino also are able to engage in practices of knowledge transfer through the storytelling that she brings up in her speech. Montreal notes that Lola is part of a fictional “Filipino Indigenous group with its own sets of values and beliefs... based in the northern part of the Philippines.”⁶² Sprinkled throughout the play are nods to her Indigeneity such as a poster on her wall of Chico Dam as well as the folklore she shares with Dino in order to teach him about colonialism and the historical cosmologies that structure his cultural ancestry, as well as help him begin his process of healing. In particular, she tells him about a babaylan who cares for a white warlock, who eventually brought sickness and greed to her tribe. When she ends the story, she asks Dino to give her some of his burden to lighten his load.⁶³ Lola begins her story with the figure of the babaylan, whom she describes as a priestess that has often been used as an ancestral point of cultural connectivity for genderfluid, trans, and nonbinary bodies within the contemporary queer Filipinx diaspora. Here, she centres a queer subject as the valued figure in the legend in hopes that Dino will see aspects of himself within it.⁶⁴ Understanding the tenuous affects that shape Dino’s relationship with his father, she tells Dino this story to help him feel less alone about being abandoned by his Tatay and offers to carry his trauma instead. By rooting these legends in her Indigeneity, Lola’s stories provide a port of entry into the ongoing legacies of settler colonialism within a transnational context.

While this story evidently provides Dino with lessons and teachings of colonialism and capitalism as violences of empire, it is crucial to consider the stakes of these legends. While I do not mean to disenfranchise the necessary cultural productions of the plethora of Philippine Indigenous communities, we must hold both of these histories alongside and in conversation with each other. In thinking about the intersections of multiculturalism in settler-colonial and so-called Canada, Sonny Dhoot states, “The representation of Indigenous peoples... within multicultural discourses conceal settler colonialism and underlying genocide goals.”⁶⁵ As such, it is important to consider not only Lola and Dino’s psychic, spiritual, and emotional intimacies within the home,

61. *Ibid.*, 273.

62. Montreal, “Transgressing Borders, Generations, and Taboos,” 309.

63. Montreal, “My Grandmother and I,” 287.

64. While the babaylan are also often read as trans subjects, I do not seek to conflate or read them utilizing modern conceptions of gender identity.

65. Sonny Dhoot, “Pink Games on Stolen Land: Pride House and (Un)Queer Reterritorializations,” in *Disrupting Queer Inclusion*, 57.

but also their geographical relationships to home. While Lola's legends offer new and diasporic intergenerational moments of pedagogy and knowledge transfer, Dino and Lola's kinship also functions within and on the Indigenous land of Turtle Island, a land peaceably shared through the Dish with One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant between the Haudenosaunee, Anishinaabe, and the Huron-Wendat nations. Although Lola is Indigenous, her location within Canada employs a new set of power structures on a transnational scale. In particular, Robert Diaz states, "Regardless of whether they ascribe to or reject dominant ideologies of race and sexuality in Canada, queer Filipinos/as inhabit a place that continues to systematically displace and disenfranchise Indigenous people."⁶⁶ As such, we must consider the processes of diasporic movement and settler colonialism that have "reproduced Indigenous and non-Indigenous subjects as Other," albeit, unevenly.⁶⁷

While global processes like transnational migrant labour are structured to maintain settler colonialism, I read Lola's storytelling and positionality as an Indigenous person in Canada as a possible site and entry point into global Indigenous solidarities. This is particularly salient during a conversation between Lola and Marissa, in which Lola teaches her granddaughter about the greed of the Philippine elite, who killed her late husband while he was defending land on which they sought to build a dam for electricity. Marissa replies, "Your story sounds very familiar, Grandma. It's the same story James told me about how the native people were displaced and continue to be discriminated against in North America. You two should talk sometime..."⁶⁸ Lola's teachings provide Marissa with an opportunity to find connections between Philippine land defense, which gestures towards the activism of the Kalinga peoples during the proposed Chico River Dam Project, and the continued experiences of settler-colonial violence for Indigenous communities in Canada. So, as Lola works to help Dino on his spectral journey, her storytelling with Dino and Marissa opens space for transnational modes of solidarity between Indigenous groups in the Philippines and across Turtle Island, both within political organizing as well as in our everyday encounters.

Finally, Lola and Dino engage in a practice of care that seeks to reimagine the care injustices that structure their being in Canada. Akemi Nishida describes "care injustice" as infrastructures and institutions "where people—whether they are situated as care workers, care receivers, and others—deteriorate under the name of care when care is used as a mechanism to enhance political economy and neglect the well-being of those situated as care workers and care recipients."⁶⁹ In *My Grandmother and I*, these care injustices take shape as transnational migrant labour programs which seek to reify the heteronormative nuclear family model while often overworking and underpaying their care workers, languages of multiculturalism that often obscure the precarities and oppressions experiences by racialized queer citizen-subjects in settler-colonial Canada, as well as the failures of public healthcare systems to attend

66. Robert Diaz, "Queer Unsettlements: Diasporic Filipinos in Canada's World Pride," *Journal of Asian American Studies* 19, no. 3 (2016): 345.

67. *Ibid.*, 345.

68. Montreal, "My Grandmother and I," 289.

69. Nishida, *Just Care*, 7.

to sick and dying racialized and queer migrant during the HIV/AIDS epidemic. As such, care is utilized as a tool for the violence imposed upon and neglect of minoritarian subjects. However, Dino and Lola enact a different kind of care than those used within these 1990s infrastructures. They enact what Nishida refers to as “just care” which “occurs when people feel cared for affirmatively, whether they are situated as care workers, care receivers, or both, and when care is used to improve the well-being of people, the community, and the surrounding (i.e., natural and built) environment, and for more-just world building.”⁷⁰ While discourses of HIV/AIDS, the facade of multicultural Canada, and transnational migrant labour programs continue the work of empire to continually erase, vilify, and police racialized queer citizen-subjects, Lola and Dino dream of other kinds of, and possibilities for, care. While much of care work scholarship within Filipinx Canadian studies centres on the verticality of care (i.e., the carer and the caree, employer and caregiver, etc.) such as the crucial and critical work of Ethel Tungohan, Dani Magsumbol, and Conely De Leon, Dino and Lola attempt to work against these binaries. The verticality of care signifies modes of transaction between carer and caree, through which the carer offers affective labour in exchange for compensation and often through conditions of exploitation and precarity.⁷¹ These ways of thinking through care situate the carer in a position of lack, that must engage in this kind of care in order to receive resources and rewards. These verticalities pave way for various modes of exploitation and devaluation and continue to ascribe entitlement to the caree while simultaneously invisibilizing the needs of the carer. Though they are located in Canada by way of these vertical care structures and infrastructures, Dino and Lola’s care for each other operates outside of these capitalist logics.⁷²

Instead, Dino and Lola’s just care moves horizontally, rhizomatically, multidirectionally across various spaces, times, lives, and afterlives. The end of Lola’s speech at the funeral, in which she pleads, “He is here now. His spirit is restless... Addatuy iti apukuk... We have to help him find peace... Tulungan tayo tapno agtal na isuna,” portrays her desires to foster collective care over Dino within the everyday.⁷³ Though this care operates outside of compensation and domestic labour infrastructures, her care over Dino gestures towards “more-just worldbuilding.”⁷⁴ Through her support of Dino, Lola works through the tensions of anti-Indigeneity that exist between Tatay, Marissa, and her boyfriend James, the intergenerational divides between Nanay and Marissa, as well as Tatay’s homophobia. Her use of humour to soothe Dino’s journey, Dino’s teasing of Lola, as well as their consistent mutual check-ins to see how further they can support each other reveal a mode of care that is not a

70. Ibid.

71. Ethel Tungohan, “Reconceptualizing Motherhood, Reconceptualizing Resistance: Migrant Domestic Workers, Transnational Hyper-maternalism and Activism,” *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 15, no. 1 (2013): 39–57.
 Dani Magsumbol, “A Political Economy of Emotions,” *Alon: Journal for Filipinx American and Diasporic Studies* 2, no. 2 (2022): 125–128.
 Conely de Leon, “Family Separation and Reunification Among Former Filipina Migrant Domestic Workers and Their Adult Daughters in Two Canadian Cities,” in *When Care Work Goes Global: Locating the Social Relations of Domestic Work*, edited by Mary Romero, Valerie Preston, and Wenona Giles (New York, NY: Routledge Press, 2016), 139–155.

72. While compensating care work does not always operate within capitalist logics, I particularly refer here to the structures of transnational migrant labour that are entrenched in logics of imperialism, capital extraction, and neoliberalism.

73. Montreal, “My Grandmother and I,” 297.

74. Ibid.

compensated mode of transnational care work as understood within migrant labour, but a fugitive yet necessary everyday care that simply seeks to affirm Dino's existence as a queer Filipinx person deserving and worthy of his family's love. At the end of the play, Lola returns to her room hopeful that Dino will be there but finds out that he is gone and has continued onto the spirit realm. Crying for the first time in the play she says, "Yes, be at peace my apuku. Be at peace."⁷⁵ As such, Lola and Dino's care for each other does not operate within the frameworks of transaction or views of each other simply within the binary of carer-caree but move in more capacious and abounding directions that seek to connect people and communities on various scales: transnational, national, local, and every day.

Instead, their care embodies the political promise of the commonly used term, "ingat." Ninotchka Rosca traces and names the historical significance of this term, writing,

Ingat (careful out there) became the word of goodbye, replacing the old "sige," during the martial law years. It was the last word uttered between and among those meeting to discuss what had to be done, in ways big and small, to end the Marcos Dictatorship. It was said with all the love and respect one was capable of. Because chances were one would meet again only in a prison cell, or a torture house (called a safe house by the military) or at a wake.⁷⁶

Rosca conceptualizes this term as a product of Filipinx resistance and imagination; it is that hopeful care which persists beyond death, what imperial forces could never and will never cease. Despite living within these violences, this kind of care says: There is always a home for you with me. Wherever you go, though I cannot be with you, I want you to know that I am holding your heart in my hands. Even the promise of death cannot stop my care for you. Moreover, this ethic allows us to think outside of a singular life and galvanizes what Allan Punzalan Isaac calls "communality."⁷⁷ It is a voluminous care that overflows the bounds of time, body, and space. Building on Rosca's historical accounting, I argue that Dino and Lola refuse *sayang* to perform other modes of care that refuse to assimilate into capitalist or imperial logics and imagine other modes of sociality.

Through life and death, this care allows for Dino and Lola to create other worlds, other material realities that center pleasure, joy, and intimacy. It is both of their engagement in a refusal of *sayang* that allows the audience to glean the fullness of Dino's hopeful life: his loyalty, traumas, creativity, kinks, humour, and love.

While much of care work scholarship across the Filipinx labour diaspora focuses on the verticality of care, the institutionalization of care, and its transactional qualities, Dino and Lola perform a different ethics of care.

75. *Ibid.* 306.

76. Ingat (careful out there) became the word of good-bye, replacing the old 'sige,' during the martial law years," Ninotchka Rosca, Facebook, March 28, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/ninotchka.rosca/posts/pfbid035EPDLVkb3VeHFvKtj2dIPiiQ3xaxnB5Go3d3zNbwju4MljD1f8TMDRQnzXnPrTEI>.

77. Allan Punzalan Isaac, *Filipino Time: Affective Worlds and Contracted Labor* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2021), 21.

Dino's abounding care not only made his life worth living, but engendered moments of collective joy, laughter, and promise to those who shared that life and death with him. Death could not cease his beautifully vast queer care. Despite the atmospheres of violence that he moves through, Dino's softness endures.⁷⁸ His vulnerability endures. His silliness endures. And Lola tends to their persistence.

Dino and Lola's kinship also overflows the boundaries of what is deemed valuable for this diasporic Filipinx family. As such, this relationship is inherently queer "because its version of coming together necessarily recites and refashions diasporic articulations of sexuality, masculinity, and solidarity."⁷⁹ Not only does this form a strike contrast to the values of masculinity conveyed by Dino's family and informed by the imperial nation-state, but, thinking globally, their relationship also diverges from the value of diasporic Filipinx subjects only as commodities and producers of labour within the Global North. While programs such as the Live-In Caregiver Program (LCP) valorize the racialized labour of the migrant worker as a maintainer of the private home, Dino and Lola take what is deemed *sayang* and reshape, reform, and renew it into a diasporic currency of possibility through value. As such, not only do Lola and Dino's values of their kinship queer their family's understandings of queerness and masculinity, but also queer and reorient the frame from which Filipinx subjects exist in Canada in the first place. While their relationship operates within normative structures of family and kinship, their intimacy offers us new ways of thinking through family, queerness, diaspora, and value, and enables new meanings for queer Filipinx masculinities and kinships in Canada. However, it is crucial to consider what work Dino and Lola's kinship does within Canada as it is currently structured within the global capital/colonial formation, particularly as diasporic subjects.

Despite these possibilities for kinship and care, these generative capacities are conditioned by the overreliance on Lola, Marissa, and Dino's best friend, Jessie, to perform resilience, regulation, and emotional labour that not only incites interiorized assumptions of the gender binary within the nuclear household, but still works within the institutional infrastructures of citizen-making. According to Rutger Claassen, "The commodification of care occurs when caring activities that were previously provided for on an informal basis are now being redirected toward the market."⁸⁰ In stating this, he points out that commodification relies upon the representation of particular bodies and their physical and affective labour as objects, products, and services that can be reoriented towards the accumulation of economic capital. The Care Chain, the FDM, and LCP all function as projects that situate human resources as trade commodities, where the physical and affective care of Filipinas can produce profit within and for the white nuclear family. Similarly, disability studies scholar Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha poignantly writes, "Not paying attention to the gendered/raced/classed dynamics of care—a.k.a., are the poor and working-class disabled femmes doing all the work all the time?"

78. Eric A. Stanley, *Atmospheres of Violence: Structuring Antagonism and the Trans/Queer Ungovernable* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021).

79. Robert Diaz, "The 'Stuff' of Queer Horizons and Other Utopic Pursuits," in *Diasporic Intimacies*, xviii.

80. Rutger Claassen, "The Commodification of Care," *Hypatia* 26, no. 1 (2011): 45.

Care is feminized and invisibilized labor.”⁸¹ In *My Grandmother and I*, women and femmes are constantly providing this work. Lola not only guides Dino on his journey through both the spirit and human-world, but also maintains the nuclear family unit in their processes of mourning, especially respecting the wishes and dignity of Dino after his death.

As briefly noted earlier, anti-Indigenous sentiments arise at Dino’s wake visitation when Marissa invites her Indigenous boyfriend to the funeral. In addition to her own grieving, Marissa attempts to destigmatize Tatay’s overt anti-Indigeneity. Moreover, Marissa must negotiate Nanay’s disregard of her intersecting experiences of racism, misogyny, and classism as a second-generation Filipinx-Canadian. Throughout the play, Jessie, Dino’s close friend, engages in self-restrained, kind, and diplomatic banter with Tatay as she experiences his explicit and directed misgendering, misnaming, as well as unconcealed transmisogyny. As such, not only do the women in Dino’s nuclear family engage in this gendered and expected affective labour, the femmes outside of this kinship unit also engage in the emotional labour of helping Tatay through his internalized racism, homophobia, and transphobia.

In this, the feminized Filipinx is rebranded as a sacrificial martyr who is subsequently valorized as a maternal figure of care for the diasporic family. In the cases of Lola, Marissa, and Jessie, their care work was not enacted through volunteerism, but of necessity, gendered assumptions and expectations, and survivance. While the possibilities I read earlier in this article enable new modes of kinship and diasporic intimacy, they are hindered by the constraint of the nuclear family, the commodification of the Filipina body as a producer of labour, and the vilification/valorization of the feminized Filipinx subject. What these representations suggest is a visual language of what it means to be a feminized Filipinx subject in Canada. Structured through the citizenship-making efforts of transnational migration and the heteronormative family, the Filipina subject becomes the labourer of the white nuclear family, but also of the diasporic home. In this way, not only are Dino and his Lola’s diasporic intimacies enacted within the confines of citizenship, but also reproduce the very infrastructures that maintain racial, sexual, and class hierarchies within the citizen-making nation-state.

Conclusion

Dino and Lola’s many refusals of “sayang” continue to serve as nodes through which we can recognize the violences of empire and their constitutive racial logics, formations through which queer Filipinx lives are constantly deemed non-valuable and disposable. However, when we linger with these affective traces, it becomes clear that their kinship refuses these logics of containment and offer new ways of thinking about worth, queerness, and care. By closely listening and vigilantly attending to each other’s needs, Dino and Lola outline another kind of communality that refuses vertical and transactional models of care and instead simply asks: how can I help you? While scholarship centring on HIV/ AIDS offers multiple narratives of queer loss, mourning, and melancholia, Lani Montreal’s 1994 play, *My Grandmother and I*, reorients these affectively

81. Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice* (Vancouver, BC: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2018), 66.

immersed epistemological subject. While Dino's queerness and masculinity are characterized as waste, his Lola's care for him centralizes values that delineate from the commodification of the Filipina body as labour in Canada.

Yet, caught between the citizen-making forces of multiculturalism, care work, and HIV/AIDS in the early 1990s, Dino and his Lola dwell in a liminal space that both enables and constrains queer diasporic possibilities. Their entanglements within Turtle Island's ongoing and underlying settler-colonial and capitalist projects and reification of the Filipina as the valorized/vilified regulator of the nuclear family limits the possibilities of diasporic family units and mourning at the moment of their implosion. That is not to say that these imaginings are of no use. Instead, I read these politically-charged entanglements as possibilities for transnational solidarity and the beginnings of what Walcott calls "multiculturalism par excellence," the early cultivations towards a language of coalition and negotiation that asks how we can live with one another through difference. What Dino and Lola offer here marks more than an inversion of melancholia and mourning. Their diasporic intimacy gestures towards a particular kind of freedom, a world that can be gleaned out of the fugitive political, racial, and social realities continually imagined by and through queer kinships.

Acknowledgements

I want to thank the organizers of FilipiNEXT: JP Catungal, Marissa Largo, and Casey Mecija; my fellow panelists; all who generously commented and held space for Dino and Lola with me in that room; and my anonymous reviewers—I am so grateful for your insights and care. I offer my sincerest gratitude to Robert Diaz and Dai Kojima, who were so kind to read the first emergence of this article as a chapter of my Master's Research Paper at the University of Toronto in 2019, who continue to support my thinking and work, and of whose work I am deeply indebted to. I also want to thank Rejoice Abutsa, Gina Goico, and Imogen Tam who have all tended to me and nourished me as I wrote this article—there are no words to express my love for you all. I dedicate this work to the women of my family: my sister, Angelica Dela Cruz; my mother, Elsa Dela Cruz; my Lola, Nelia Dela Cruz; and my Mang Baket, Lucenia Monzon.